

## Duxbury Winter Wonder Walks

(Recommended by those age 65-95)

By THE REV. CANON ROBERT MERRY

Now that the angels have returned to heaven, the shepherds to their flocks, the Wise Men to their Eastern Kingdoms, the tree is down and the wreaths and lights put away, we settle down to face what are often called the "winter doldrums." "After all what is there to do," we ask ourselves, "if we don't have enough money to motor to Florida or the Southwest or cruise the Caribbean?" Some of us will remain in Duxbury from necessity and some from deliberate choice. Those who don't ski, or sled ride and whose doctors have warned against shoveling snow - it is these latter I have in mind as I write these lines. And I am supporting walking as not only exercise, but as a tonic to the spirits, a means of enhancing the enjoyment of life. It is to expand the heart and mind as well as the lungs and muscles that I recommend this activity especially for those of "advanced years." This is why I have called these "wonder-walks" for they seek to fill our souls with admiration and appreciation for God's creation, and Duxbury is one place where this can be done with great satisfaction. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "Tis the best of humanity who goes out to walk." For walking, our doctors tell us, is the safest way to strengthen heart and lungs and bones. It can also improve circulation and relieve stress.

This essay comes out of my wife Harriet and my walking experiences in Duxbury, from which we have derived so much satisfaction. I would like to share it with readers of the *Clipper* in hopes that they may enjoy similar experiences. I am aware of many opportunities for organized walks. Most are advertised in the *Clipper* every week: the senior walks on Tuesday at 9:30 sponsored by the Council on Aging and the many walks led by David Clapp for the Mass. Audubon Society plus the new effort now coming out of Lura Cushman's former house by the Plymouth County Wildlands Trust. I am talking about something entirely different. I admire these organized walks but for many reasons they are just not my cup of tea. These walks are for individuals or at most couples and there are certain conditions that apply to them.

First of all they are "winter walks" and are best undertaken when the temperatures are between 25 and 35 degrees to provide surface solid enough for walking, when streams and gullies are covered with protective ice. Harriet and I have found the hours between 3 and 5 most satisfactory especially as this may provide a lovely sunset. Remember these are "wonder" walks and expect walkers to look at the world around them, perhaps enjoying bird sightings or if there is snow on the ground reading messages from the small rodents. All creation is spread out for us to enjoy and although much is sleeping in winter and storing up energy with which to burst forth in the spring it is here to ponder.

A few preliminary suggestions: clothing should be ample and loose enough to encourage circulation. Shoes and socks must be warm and comfortable. I always carry a walking stick (I prefer this name to "cane" since it is for stability in covering what may be uneven terrain). I also love to have a dog along for companionship, with leash handy in case other animals are encountered. I also have planned these walks to occupy less than an hour, as septuagenarians and octogenarians are most comfortable without too strenuous a workout. We in Duxbury have the unique privilege of doing these walks in woodlands and on the seashore (necessarily at low tide) and in connection with Duxbury's historic spots. These three categories may help us get a handle on this enterprise and help us to see the easily practical dimensions of this activity.

First let us look at the woodland walks. I would like to begin with the Round Pond and Audubon and North Hill areas as these have been laid out and marked by environmentally oriented people. Two parking lots invite us to park our cars about a mile beyond the transfer station on Mayflower St. (beginning from Tremont). Each lot sports a map and an outline of the trails, red trails and yellow trails. One trail leads to the North Hill Marsh on the right (where many Indian artifacts have been found) and to the bird sighting platform. We are careful about our dogs here as Audubon restricts the adjacent area for birds nesting. Other trails leaving from beyond the parking lot on the left of Mayflower St, a yellow trail touching the edge of Round Pond, leading up over a short hill and back to the shore to the exact spot where my father's ice house stood 50 years ago. It was my recollection of following a woods road straight across these woods parallel to Tremont St. that triggered the movement to set up these trails 3 years ago. There are 2 unmarked trails that I do not recommend to octogenarians, as they would take at least 2 hours and maybe more. One would skirt North Hill marsh and follow Malachy Brook past my brother Stan's cranberry bog, circle around to Route 14 and then back by Duxbury's newly acquired Waiting Hill to Mayflower St. near the exit into Lincoln. The other would begin at the same spot but instead of turning left at Stan's bog, turning right over the North Hill golf course, heading due east and



Round Pond off Mayflower St.

down the hill almost to Bud Goodrich's "Hounds Ditch" development and then south over an old wagon road which comes out opposite the transfer station. Harriet and I have tracked both these trails but we do not use them regularly. We have also touched upon some trails in some of the town's open land in the Ashdod area and we are assured by our new environmental coordinator Joe Grady that many of these will soon be opened, and marked and cleaned up for Duxbury walkers. It must be added here that I believe we are just at the beginning of widespread use of these lands for this kind of passive recreation.

The second classification for winter wonder walks is what I have called "seashore walks" and here Duxbury is unique in its opportunities for enjoying the winter wonders. First of all again it is best if the temperature is below freezing to harden soft spots and seal up puddles and brooks and muddied areas. Here it is best also to walk below the water tidal line. A good time is an hour after low tide so the shore has had time to dry and perhaps freeze. Another reason for this is that waterfront property owners might not object to seeing strangers parading before their picture windows below the high water mark. Massachusetts is the only state in the union that grants property rights to the mean low water mark so legally at this moment at least this may be a problem which is now under litigation. At any rate Duxbury had 22 town landings in 1860 and many of them have been obliterated, leaving the question moot, which is where we'll also leave it.

The first seashore walk can begin at the Old Cove and simply follow the shore along the Back River of Powder Point, which is considerably grown over since this postcard picture was taken around 1900. A quick glance across the enormous marsh to Rouse's Hummock helps you realize you are retracing the course of the French Atlantic Cable that landed here in 1869. Here we meet the Gurnet Bridge, a perfect stretcher for muscles, lungs and bones. Some friends of mine walk over and back, just touching the beach as a day's tonic to the spirits. A turn across and back, depending on the pace, takes about 40 minutes.

And of course, the beach is a mecca for all nuts about physical fitness. You can park your car off High Pines and walk back to the bridge or ahead to Gurnet. The beach is full of wonders, with birds of all kinds stopping for nesting, or feeding or simply resting on their migratory flights. The important thing to remember is that we are walking to share wonders, on land and sea and sky, and we pause not just for breath, but to appreciate who and where we are and who else is here and how we can help them enjoy a better life. Two winters ago Joe Grady and Brad Martin, our 2 experts on lands and resources, pointed out 2 snowy owls on the bay ice nearby. One of the great wonders of Duxbury is to see the bay frozen over as I did a few winters ago. Elden Wadsworth recalls (as I do not) that the boys at Powder Point School used to build make-shift ice boats in severe winters and sail them over to Clark's Island. The height of ice cliffs on the beach in 1936 as on this postcard, certainly suggests the plausibility of such activities. I do remember driving a horse and wagon down the beach to carry supplies to the gunning stands with ice cakes 3 and 4 feet high all around me.

Parking the car at Gurnet after getting permission from Frank Nudd to do so provides another scenic and historic walk not only around the lighthouse and lookout from which Provincetown is visible on a clear day, but a trip down the beach to Saquish Point and Fort Standish. I repeat this is best done an hour after low tide as this usually provides firm footing,

whereas the loose sand higher up is very difficult to cope with for us octogenarians. Wandering among the earthworks put up here in the War of 1812 one can easily imagine soldiers drilling for forays out to break the British blockade.

Perhaps Harriet's and my favorite walk is to drive down to the Myles Standish Home site at the end of Standish Shore, follow the path down to the beach below past the granite slab marking the spot where Myles' spring stood for over 200 years until it was wiped out in a storm in 1851 and up to the two beach cottages on the point. Depending on the temperature and wind we then head back east around the end of the bluff to what we've come to call the Indian named streets. The entire trip from home and back again (I live on a bluff above Bay Rd) takes less than an hour and is a real bracer. It can be especially beautiful just before and after sunset.

As we leave the seashore walks, I am reminded of one person whose walk along a beach inspired some words that have come down through generations and I was required to memorize them. I've always been grateful to Miss Downey for this: William Cullen Bryant's "To a Water Fowl" - "Whither midst falling dew, while glow the heavens with the last steps of day, far from its rosy depths, dost thou pursue thy solitary way? - concluding with the immortal lines - "He who from zone to zone, guides through the air thy certain flight, in the long way that I must tread alone, will guide my steps aright."

It is next to impossible to say what our favorite walk is but certainly right up there would be the climb up to the Standish Monument. It is probably a good wonder walk for beginners. It is a stiff climb but provides a break halfway up with a vista of Plymouth and Plymouth Beach facing south. A few yards further there is a clear view of Gurnet and Saquish and Clark's Island. When you reach the summit on a clear afternoon preferably just around sunset Provincetown stands out clear with the white sands of Race Point and with the assist of binoculars, the Pilgrim town. I remember one sunset trip we took in winter when most of the bay was frozen and ice fringed the beach, but this time it was colored coral pink in the sunset glow reminding me of Homer's words in the *Illiad* describing the pink of daybreak:

"Then Aurora, the rosy-fingered daughter of the dawn stepped forth."

Coming down the hill the last red rays of the sun shone between the branches of the trees and another day was done.

There are many other walks and many Duxburyites have their own favorites. Historical walks include all of these, because if you look deep enough almost every spot can be found to have a history. A walk parking your car at the John Alden House through the path that leads to his original home site past the intermediate school playgrounds will take you through the former residence of Lura Cushman now a center for the Plymouth County Wildlands trust and to the town landing on Blue Fish River which John Alden turned over to the town in exchange for a few acres of the common lands. A walk around Powder Point itself beginning at the Drew House opposite the old Cable Office Building and touching at Old Dick's monument (the brick memorial to a horse who had brought up 3 generations of children) and stopping at King Caesar House and Bumpus Park from which you can still see the oaken remains of the keel of Captain Parker Hall's ship, the George R. Smith.

Actually everything is history in Duxbury. And over all hangs the final mystery how the courageous souls who came here on the Mayflower, religious refugees were able to survive the 55 stormy days of the crossing and the rigors of that first winter when half of them died. The marvel too is that when the Mayflower went back the following spring not one of the little band was on board. It is this courage and determination that lies at the foundation of this nation and has seen her through many trials ever since. Certainly the greatest wonder of all these wonder walks is that indeed Someone must have been guiding and helping all through these years.